ZJER

ZIMBABWE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Volume 13 Number 3 November 2001

ISSN 11013 - 3445

CONTENTS

The Views of Blind Pupils Towards Inclusive Education

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Abstract

This study investigated the views of blind primary school pupils towards inclusive education. The main objective was to assess how people with disabilities themselves view inclusive education. Do they appreciate and accept it? The study was conducted in one primary school in Zimbabwe in November, 2000. Fifty (50) blind pupils were involved. A Likert-type questionnaire (brailled) which required subjects to give reasons for their answers, was the instrument used to collect data. Data analysis was done using the Likert scale analysis procedures typical of attitudinal studies. The study established that the majority of blind pupils (63%) were against inclusive education. Many felt that apart from social and academic rejection, they would not be able to acquire useful skills and knowledge in inclusive settings.

Background to the Study

Many governments and schools are presently facing pressures from Human Rights Organisations (e.g. the United Nations) and advocates of inclusive education to include children with various disabilities in ordinary schools. Thus, inclusive education is a concept that views children with disabilities as full time participants and members of their neighbourhood schools and

communities (Knight, 1999). It involves all children learning together in the same physical and social environment. The argument in inclusive education is that since society is an inclusive community, the school as a miniature society must also be inclusive so as to prepare children for the life in society. Separate schooling is seen as being alienistic; ending up being a more serious disability to people with disability than the disabilities themselves. Hence, inclusion advocates education in which diversity in individuals is not only tolerated, but is also seen as a source of richness. Children should appreciate each other and learn from their differences. For Giorcelli (1995) full and meaningful inclusion involves, among other things, zero rejection philosophy, co-operate learning and special social, economic and educational support given to the regular school by all those concerned. According to Mushoriwa (2001 in press) the other reason often advanced in favour of inclusive education is that, special schools, especially in developing countries where they are few in number, are able to meet the needs of only a tiny fraction of children with disabilities. For this reason, mainstream provision is seen as offering the only opportunity for the majority of children with disabilities to receive education.

Despite the good intentions expressed above, what is disturbing is that to date, very few studies have been conducted regarding the views of various stakeholders on inclusive education (Booth & Ainscow, 1998) yet, and surprisingly, inclusive education is being and has been implemented in many countries and schools. To the writer, there is need for concern here because, unless various stakeholders such as teachers, parents, pupils, etc. view inclusive education positively, attempts to implement this concept may be futile. "When teachers resist a change, the change will only be implemented with considerable social dislocation and high social cost." (Ungerleider, 1993:98).

Mushoriwa (2001, in press) conducted a study among primary school teachers in Harare, Zimbabwe, investigating their attitudes towards inclusive education. Overall, the study established that the majority of teachers (86%) were rejecting to inclusive education. Two main reasons were advanced. Inclusion would result in (i) children with disabilities being frustrated because of social and academic rejection (ii) teachers being unable to give children with disabilities the most relevant and appropriate skills and knowledge because of high teacher-pupil ratios. It is such research findings that have spurred the present author to investigate what children with disabilities themselves think about their being included in regular schools.

Methodology

Though the Likert-type questionnaire was adopted from Booth and Ainscow (1998) with minor modifications, the author felt it necessary to pilot with the instrument since circumstances, subjects and the environment were different. The questionnaire, which had been brailled, was thus test-run with a group of 15 blind pupils. The aim was to tidy up research procedures and to test the validity and reliability of the instrument.

Reliability of items was obtained by scoring all items and adding scale values of each item to get the total attitude score for each subject. Basing on these total scores, scripts were ranked. The whole group was divided into 25% highest scores and 25% lowest scores. Counting 4 and 5 as positive scores, proportions of the positive scores were used as though they were correct answers in an attainment test. An upper and lower analysis of the difference between the proportions of positive scores in the upper and lower groups was done. The

process was repeated by counting 1 and 2 as negative scores. Only items with H-L values of 20% or more were accepted. This process ensured that all items were unidimensional and were therefore valid and reliable. In all, the research procedure for the pilot study formed the basis for the procedure of the main study.

Sample

Fifty (50) blind pupils were involved in this study. However, of these, four (4) did not complete all the questionnaire items, hence, these were not used in the study. Thus, 46 pupils with complete data sets were finally involved in the study. The pupils involved in the study were randomly selected from grade 4 (p 4) to grade 7 (p 7). Twenty of them were females while 26 were males. Only grades 4 to 7 pupils were involved because these were considered fairly mature and were therefore able to, not only understand the issues involved, but also to give reasons for their answers as required by the questionnaire. The sample (N = 46) was considered representative given the small class sizes in most special schools.

Instruments

The survey design used in this study involved the use of a Likert-type questionnaire to collect data. Because of their anonymity, questionnaires were particularly suitable since respondents were free to give their real views on inclusive education. A total of 50 questionnaires were distributed to pupils by their teachers. As already noted, only 46 questionnaires were used because these had complete data sets. The questionnaire had 11 items and for each item,

respondents were asked to give reasons for their answers. The first 10 items tapped pupils' views towards including them in regular schools while the last item required the pupils to choose where they would want/prefer to attend school between a special school, a regular school and a special class within a regular school.

Scoring

The Likert scale used Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Undecided (U); Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The Likert scale was scored in the following manner:

Table 1
Scoring the Likert Scale

	SA	A	U	D	SD
Positive Statement	5	4	3	2	1
Negative Statement	1	2	3	4	5

Statements were first classified into positive and negative. Positive statements were then scored 5 from Strongly Agree down to 1 for Strongly Disagree while negative statements were scored 1 for Strongly Agree up to 5 for Strongly Disagree. Each respondent's item scores were next summed up to get a total score. Since the questionnaire had 11 items, there was a maximum possible score of 55 (11 x 5) and a necessary minimum score of 11 (11 x 1). To see whether the respondents' views were positive or negative, a score above half the maximum possible score 27,5 was regarded positive while scores below 27,5 were regarded negative. The neutral points (27,5 and undecided) were not

included for purposes of analysis in order to make the results directional (Fishbein, 1975). In this study, high scale scores meant a favourable disposition or view while low scale scores meant an unfavourable disposition towards inclusive education. This means that overall, if there were more high scale scores than low scale scores, we conclude that blind pupils are in favour of inclusive education.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data were transferred to coding sheets and key-punched for analysis. Crosstabs were used to compute percentages of scale scores and percentage attitudes of the respondents. The results are presented below.

Percentage of high scale scores (28 to 55) = 37%.

Percentage of low scale scores (11 to 27,5) = 63%

As shown above, the percentage of low scale scores (63%) is bigger than the percentage of high scale scores (37%). This shows that the majority of blind pupils are against being included in regular schools.The 11 questionnaire items were themselves taken to be rating scales and as such, were analysed individually.

Table 2

Number and percentage of Pupils Showing Favourable and Unfavourable Dispositions towards each of the 11 Questionnaire Items.

Variable	Positive	Negative
1. Increase the child's circle of friends	18 (39%)	28 (61%)
2. Limit the child's level	34 (74%)	12 (26%)
3. Make the child less well adjusted socially	28 (61%)	18 (39%)
4. Ensure that the blind child will be happy to play with sighted children.	17 (37%)	29 (63%)
5. Have a negative effect on the social development of sighted children.	20 (43%)	26 (57%)
6. Provide more opportunities for sighted children to benefit from the specialised instruction for the blind child.	32 (70%)	14 (30%)
7. Develop a stronger feeling in the blind child of confidence in his/her academic performance.	26 (57%)	20 (43%)
8. Increase the amount of social rejection by sighted children.	32 (70%)	14 (30%)
9. Ensure that sighted children will be more appreciative of blind children	13 (28%)	33 (72%)
10. Make the blind child rejected by teachers in regular schools	30 (65%)	16 (35%)

1. As a Blind pupil, where would you want to attend school?	
A. Segregated (Special School)	30 (65%)
A. Regular School	10 (22%)
A. Special Class within a regular School	6 (13%)

For purposes of analysis, the first ten (10). items were regrouped into those relating to (a) social aspects (b) academic aspects.

Social Aspects. The majority of blind pupils (61%) felt that including a blind child in a regular class will not increase his/her circle of friends. Some of the striking reasons given were (i) sighted children are rough with blind children because they don't see us as full persons. (ii) sighted children fear to get close to us (the blind) lest they also "catch" blindness from us. (iii) blind children are seen as a bother because of the assistance they need from sighted children.

The responses reflect both fundamental traditional beliefs and negative attitudes some people/societies have towards the blind. It is common among many Zimbabwean communities to hear expressions such as. "I met one person and two blind ones." Such people see the disability and not the person; hence, they refer to him by his disability. Through such definitions from others, the blind child may end up having a negative attitude about himself. Describing somebody with his/her deficiencies is very hurting and demoralising; even with people without disabilities e.g. someone who is uneducated or one who is not beautiful.

What we see here is that the blind pupil is likely to be seen as someone completely different and may not be regarded as a full person by sighted children. He/she may be marginalised and relegated to a very low status in society. If the child senses this, he/she may voluntarily isolate himself/herself. In the end, this isolation becomes a more serious disability or menace to the child than the disability itself (Ladd 1991). His/her isolation cripples his/her social, emotional, physical, intellectual and linguistic development. This is so

because interaction with others has affective, psycho-motor and cognitive gains. For Hall (1992) pupils' most fundamental need in their development is to be known, accepted and valued as important members among their peers. Reezigi and Jan Pul (1998) in Booth and Ainscow (1998) found out, in the Netherlands, that pupils with disabilities who had been included in regular classes wanted to go back to their special schools after suffering isolation and stigmatisation. In some sectors of Zimbabwe, blindness is still viewed as contagious. It is believed that you can be blind or bear a child who is blind by merely looking at a blind person. Such beliefs are passed on to children who eventually want to avoid playing or mixing with blind children. In some families, disability comes as a shock; a spoiler of the family's dreams and as such, it can even result in divorce. Such prejudices and misconceptions, if passed on to children, will result in them unwilling to socialise with those with disabilities; and thus, prevent them from learning from their differences.

The above perhaps explains why many respondents (61%) (items 2) indicated that a blind child is likely to be less well-adjusted socially in an inclusive setting. Inclusive education (items 3) does not automatically make a blind child acceptable by sighted children (63%) Instead, inclusive education can increase the amount of social rejection (item 8) of the blind child (70%) because sighted children (item 9) may be less appreciative of him/her because of his/her disability. One respondent (blind child) wrote, "There is no way we can be appreciated; we can't play with others in many games." Thus, the blind themselves even doubt their acceptability by children in regular schools. Such an attitude or pre-disposition tends to work against full inclusion. It is perhaps for this reason that Dyson (1997:154) says that while attempting to include children with special educational needs in regular classes, special education to

date has merely "reproduced itself in a mainstream setting." Soder in Powers (1996) argues that the mere idea of inclusion already implies that the person is different and as such, he/she will remain different even in inclusive settings.

It was interesting to note that while most of the blind pupils felt that they would be socially disadvantaged under inclusive settings, they felt that sighted children were not likely to be disadvantaged (item 5), Fifty-seven percent (57%) of them felt that inclusive education would not have a negative effect on the social development of sighted children. The main reason given was that, sighted children being the majority, can meaningfully socialise on their own unlike the blind who may be very few in a class.

Academic Aspects. The majority of the respondents (74%) indicated that inclusive education would limit the blind child's level of academic performance or achievement. They said that in many instances, the blind pupil being a social rejectee, has problems in discussing and sharing ideas with others. This lack of interaction results in poor cognitive stimulation. A child needs developmentally facilitating opportunities and activities such as playing and sharing ideas with others. Studies such as those by Moores (1996) have shown that social development and language development are closely linked together. This shows that if a child is not accepted by others, he/she suffers in many developmental areas.

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the respondents (item 7) indicated that inclusive settings result in blind pupils losing confidence in their abilities because of poor treatment by both teachers and sighted children as well as lack of appropriate and adequate equipment in regular schools. The result is that these pupils do not

acquire necessary skills and knowledge. One respondent wrote, "Sighted children can deliberately exclude us from discussions by using signs." Other respondents expressed fears that because of large class sizes in regular schools, they may not get the necessary teacher attention and this might negatively impact on their academic achievements. Sixty-five (65%) of the blind pupils indicated that teachers in regular schools may reject them because of the extra work and demands that they are likely to make on these teachers (item 10).

Item 11 required the respondents to choose, from three types of schools, the type of school they preferred. These were (a) special school (b) regular school (c) special class within a regular school. The responses revealed that 65% wanted to be in a special school, 22% in a regular school while 13% wanted to be in a special class within a regular school. Those who preferred special schools argued that special schools really cater for their learning and developmental needs. There are specialist teachers, special facilities and equipment, they can get teacher-attention because of small class sizes, they learn with peers who have similar problems and are therefore comfortable. The majority of them argued that all this would result in them acquiring appropriate and relevant skills, knowledge and abilities in order for them to compete meaningfully with others on the job market.

Some respondents wondered whether it was fiscally possible to equip all regular schools with special facilities and equipment, especially in developing countries. One respondent remarked, "Every class in every school will have at least one child with a disability; how and where would poor governments get the special facilities and equipment needed?" Many felt that it is economically viable to have special schools where all children with a particular disability

need and use the same facilities and equipment. The 22% who preferred inclusive education contended that there is nowhere one can find a world of blind people only. Schooling is about life and as such, schools must prepare them (the blind and the sighted) for this inclusive life in society. One respondent wrote. "Inclusive education gives me a chance to be with my parents and siblings. It is also less expensive for my parents." Surely these are compelling reasons; strongly indicating a case for inclusion.

The 13% who preferred a special class within a regular school argued that this would afford them the opportunity to socialise with sighted children but still benefitting from the services of a specialist teacher and special equipment. It must be noted that it is this type of inclusion that is commonly found in Zimbabwe; otherwise special schools still remain unaltered.

Conclusion

The research results indicate that the majority of blind pupils (63%) are not in favour of inclusive education. There is a general preference for special schools as evidenced by 65% of the respondents who preferred to attend school at a special school while only 22% preferred an inclusive school and 13% wanted a special class within a regular school. Perhaps this rejecting attitude should be interpreted in a broader context such as the influence of cultural beliefs and the stage in which Zimbabwe is in as far as inclusive education is concerned. With more exposure to the concept, perhaps these rejecting attitudes and cultural beliefs may change and become favourable. It is this researchers's assertion that the rejecting attitude shown by the majority of blind pupils may partially stem

from the way society treats them and hence, to protect their ego, they prefer to be on their own in special schools.

From the above, and by extension, it can be argued that the "problems" of the blind child may thus be located more within society than within the child. If this be true, then it is high time that society re-examines itself and allow these children the full benefit of being human. Viewing disability as a crisis only serves to cause stress, frustration, intellectual and psychological malfunctioning, illness. maladjustment and even overall failure in life. "If disabled people are denied access to normal social activities, they will not only have different experiences from their able-bodied peers, but they will interpret, perceive, think, feel and talk about the world differently." (Swain et al 1994:32).

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From ZJER Editorial Board

To ZJER valued subscribers, readers and the academic community at large. ZJER wishes to make a proclamation that in 1997, ZJER Volume 9, No. 1, pp. 65-91, an article entitled, ***Research on School Effectiveness on Pupils Acheivement in Developing Countries With Special Reference to Malawi: Some Methodogical Issues*** was published under the co-authorship of Munhuweyi Peresuh and Chipo Kadzamira. In March 2001 a complaint was lodged with ZJER by Chipo Kadzamira against Munhuweyi Peresuh that he had misrepresented himself as co and principal author of the paper. ZJER's subsequent investigations established that Chipo Kadzamira's complaint was credible and correct. Subsequent to this finding ZJER wishes to advise that:

- This proclamation officially deletes that article from that specific issue.
- Readers should not give credit to Munhuweyi Peresuh as co-author, but delete his name from the article.
- That Chipo Kadzamira has now authorised ZJER to republish this article under her name.
- That it sincerely apologises to the academic community for this error

ZJER will continue to uphold and respect international academic and professional standards and procedures for academic publications.